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Governor Baker Highlights Successful Turnaround Efforts at Salem Elementary School

Teachers and Principal at Bentley Elementary School given enhanced autonomy to make decisions locally

SALEM - Governor Charlie Baker and Education Secretary James Peyser, joined by Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, visited Bentley Elementary School today to meet with the principal and faculty to discuss the school's recent improvements, following a move to grant more decision-making power to educators at the school.

Mayor Driscoll and Superintendent Margarita Ruiz gave local school officials at all Salem public schools enhanced authority to make decisions aimed at improving academic performance at their particular school. In recent years, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provided \$1.5 million in School Redesign Grant (SRG) funds to hire several staff positions in the school, including coaches, math tutors, paraprofessionals, a librarian and physical education teacher. Funds were also used to purchase curriculum materials, support a summer academic program for at-risk students and provide professional development for teachers. Last year, DESE elevated Bentley Elementary out of Level 4 status when its student performance improved dramatically. A Level 4 school is defined as an underperforming school that is both low performing on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) over a four-year period in English Language Arts, mathematics and science, and has not showed signs of substantial improvement over that time.

Bentley Elementary is now designated a Level 1 school. Additionally, seven out of nine Salem schools increased their ranking in the state accountability system.

“Bentley Elementary and the Salem school district is a great example of what can be done to improve the lives of our students when state and local officials work together to empower schools to make their own decisions,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “We are pleased to see these positive results, and thank Mayor Driscoll and Superintendent Ruiz for their leadership to create the best learning environment for students.”

The Governor’s visit to Bentley Elementary School was part of the Baker-Polito Administration’s ongoing education series to highlight various education programs, initiatives and funding opportunities from early education to college level, all aimed at providing a quality and affordable education for every student in the Commonwealth.

“Bentley school leadership and teaching staff gained the autonomy and training they needed to implement strong systems for delivering high-quality instruction, and social-emotional supports to students,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito**. “This approach empowered school-level leaders and their teams to make and sustain the changes needed for their schools.”

Governor Baker, Secretary Peyser, and Mayor Driscoll observed a 1st grade reading class and a 3rd grade math class before sitting down for a roundtable discussion with Principal Marlena Afonso and several teachers on the leadership team at Bentley. Rep. Paul Tucker (D-Salem) also joined the visit and discussion.

"When principals and teachers at a school have the proper authority to make decisions they know will benefit the student body and teachers at their particular school, we see academic performance improve, teacher morale boosted, and schools achieve their turnaround goals," **Education Secretary James Peyer said**.

“As mayor, I am committed to ensuring that Salem’s schools have the support, resources and are empowered to make changes and innovate so that every child can reach his or her highest potential, **said Salem Mayor Kimberley Driscoll**.”

“What is important to highlight here is we are a district on the move,” **Salem Superintendent of Schools Margarita Ruiz said**. “There is a clear indication that our schools are on the rise, due to an intense focus on data and really working with school leaders to look at what practices get at the heart of student performance.”

Throughout much of the Bentley Elementary School’s turnaround efforts, DESE staff worked closely with school district leadership, the Empower Schools nonprofit organization, and Blueprint Schools Network to eventually support the school’s transition to a Horace Mann Charter in the school year spanning 2015 and 2016. The school’s transition to a Horace Mann charter has been a successful model for Bentley and the Salem community.

Since taking office in 2015, the Baker-Polito Administration has proposed increasing spending on all K-12 schools by more than \$318 million. Earlier this year, after years of nominal increases for providers, Governor Baker proposed a 6% rate increase for early education providers, worth

more than \$28 million, including plans to increase annual support for infant and toddler providers by more than \$9 million. Massachusetts was recently ranked #1 in the country for education by U.S. News and World Report, and also tops the list for best performing states on Advanced Placement Exams.

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